

We'll see it when we know it: recognizing emergent Solidarity Economy.

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Introduction

This strange movement, nameless, untethered, taking place here and now in multiple forms, scarcely visible, barely sketched out, unstable but always beginning again.¹

Miguel Abensour, *Le Procès de Maîtres Rêveurs*

Since the 1980s, the concept of solidarity economy has been used around the world to describe the practices and possibilities of an alternative economy that prioritizes human solidarity, equality, and democracy and promotes a very different relationship with the planet. In the United States today, there are dozens of projects from coast to coast in which people are using the concept of solidarity economy to name and understand their work. GEO has documented much of this work.

Normally, people seeking to study or promote solidarity economy look to places where there are highly developed practices and organizations pursuing a shared strategy, like the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy or the Basque Country in Northern Spain, or, in the US, Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland or Cooperation Jackson, in Mississippi.²

In a 2017 study of solidarity economy in El Paso County, Colorado, I took a different approach, conducting a study of solidarity economy in an unlikely context, a region best known as the unofficial capital of the Fast Food Nation, home to the military industrial complex and the Religious Right. I describe that study and its results in a separate article. Here I want to share the conceptual framework I developed in order to recognize solidarity economy where it is emergent and scarcely visible, even to many of its practitioners.

The goal was to discover and identify relevant projects, organizations, and relationships and determine, if only tentatively, the degree of coherence of existing practices and

¹ All translations by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

² Other examples can be found on the archives page on the GEO website (<http://www.geo.coop/archive>)

relationships with the concept of solidarity economy. I also hoped to assess their coherence as a movement, that is, the degree to which they are networked, mutually supporting, and sharing a strategic orientation. To do this I needed a working definition of solidarity economy, a conceptual framework that would enable me to focus on key challenges, and a set of coordinates to serve as benchmarks for measurement.

If solidarity economy can serve as a tool for grasping this “barely sketched out” movement in its integrity, it might open new perspectives for collaboration and solidarity. Organizations might discover new allies and partners, new opportunities for growth, and new social, economic and political horizons. Solidarity economy can also provide a robust basis for developing tools to assessing the work of organizations and networks, along the lines of the “social audits” (*auditorias sociales*) used in Catalunya, Spain and other countries.³ The concept itself can have social impact.

Starting with a brief history of the term, the article examines four key concepts for identifying an emergent solidarity economy. I then present the nine coordinates used in the 2017 El Paso County study.

Why Solidarity Economy?

As I began my research in El Paso County, Colorado, I found that practitioners used a variety of terms: “social impact,” “fourth sector,” “social enterprise,” “sustainable business,” and “social entrepreneurship,” but none mentioned solidarity economy.

This may simply be due to the low profile of solidarity economy in the US. I suspect it is

³ See the Auditoria Social of *REAS Red de Redes* in the Basque Country (http://www.economiasolidaria.org/informe_auditoria_social_2016_reas_rdr) and Balanç Social of *Xarxa d'Economia Solidària de Catalunya* in Barcelona (<http://mercatsocial.xes.cat/ca/eines/balancsocial/>)

also related to the difficulty of defining solidarity economy, a difficulty that flows from two sources. First, the activities and organizational described by solidarity economy are diverse: not limited to one particular type of organization, one industry, or one sector. Second, solidarity economy is philosophically pluralistic not defined by one political strategy or ideology, nor by one historical tradition. There is no single list of features, characteristics, or goals. There is also a kind of conceptual interference by the dominant framework of non-profit and charitable activity, and newer notions of conscious capitalism, social responsibility, sustainability and the like.

So why use the term and conceptual framework of solidarity economy? There are two reasons:

- First, in order to build a sustainable dialogue among solidarity economy practitioners and researchers, it is useful to stick with a common terminology. Solidarity economy has proven useful as a shared identity and a point of dialogue among practitioners and theorists in the Americas;
- Second, solidarity economy is particularly useful for framing strategic reflection on economy and society – in ways that “social impact,” for example, is not – because it emphasizes concepts like equity, pluralism, the centrality of labor, planetary crisis, and social transformation.

Perhaps it is easiest to make sense of solidarity economy by looking first at the evolution of the term, building off of the timeline offered in Ethan Miller's "Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues." (Miller 2010)

History of “Solidarity Economy”

The term “solidarity economy” began to be used in its current sense by theorists and practitioners in Latin America in the 1970s. Chilean theorist Luis Razeto Migliaro recently described how he came to use it.

“I have been called the founder of the concept of solidarity economy, the one who coined the term... but I heard the expression 'solidarity economy' from a woman from a people's economic organization. It was at a Meeting of Labor Workshops that we organized... in 1981, in which various organizations participated: joint-buying groups, resource and community service centers, community kitchens, health groups, and others. We were reflecting on what identity such diverse groups might share. Our groups had different names but we were here together at this event, reflecting on and trying to find solutions to the problems we all faced... It was there that a woman from a popular organization said that... since all of the groups were economic organizations and solidarity organizations, what they shared was being solidarity economy organizations. That clarified the question of shared identity for so many organizations that were seeking to resolve economic problems through solidarity actions.” (Razeto 2016, 22)

The term was the product of participants in a popular education process of collaborative reflection and action among researchers and members of grassroots organizations, useful because it provided a shared identity and served as a point of dialogue.

1990's

In the 1990s, Miller says, solidarity economy grew as a “social movement with a research agenda.” (Miller 2010, 2) Popular organizations and researchers formed local, regional and national networks in many countries including Brazil, France, Peru, Spain, Argentina, Mexico, and Quebec. (Miller 2010)

Other writers have pointed out that the understanding of solidarity economy and its use “varied depending on the geographic perspective and socio-historical perspective” from which the concept was approached. (Guerra 2002) In France, where “social economy” had been the dominant term for over a century, solidarity economy was used to name “a new generation of social economy... a (re)emergence of the ‘old’ social economy principles” of solidarity, reciprocity, and associationism in new, more diverse forms. (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005, 9).⁴ As capitalism became hegemonic, “social economy” became institutionalized as another sector alongside the “market” and “state” sectors, autonomous, but also integrated into them by providing services they failed or chose not to provide, thus supplementing and stabilizing the system. The concept of solidarity economy called into question this division, “repoliticizing” the economy by challenging its separation from, and domination over society, and demanding democratization of the socio-economy. (Uriarte, Pagalday & Zufiaurre 2012, Lipietz 2000, Laville 2013)

Ironically, the assertion of a new, pluralist orientation that embraces a diversity of economic forms led to the creation of the catchall term “social and solidarity economy” that has come to be commonly used by European organizations. (Laville and Cary 2015)

Still, many theorists continue to stress the specific character of solidarity economy even

⁴ Associationism was a movement contemporaneous with the emergence of industrial capitalism, centered on human solidarity and freedom, that rejected the separation between economic and social practices. Perhaps the most famous Associationist was Charles Fourier whose ideas inspired dozens of “phalanxes” and other communities, as described in John H. Noyes' *History of American Socialisms*. (Noyes, 1870)

as they emphasize its inherent pluralism:

“Solidarity economy is a heterogeneous phenomenon that covers different economic sectors and different phases of the economic cycle. It adopts a variety of organizational forms. Labor organizations, social movements, universities and governments actively promote solidarity economy from different fields of activity... In a wide range of sectors and geographic locations, social-economic activities are launched by working class and popular sectors motivated by necessity and the desire for social justice.” (Uriarte, Pagalday & Zufiaurre 2012)

2000's

The first “truly international” meeting of the solidarity economy movement took place in Lima, Peru in 1997, leading to the formation of “the Intercontinental Network for the promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy, or RIPESS.”⁵ (Miller 2010, 2) RIPESS adopted the following definition of solidarity economy:

“The social solidarity economy is based on human values and principles of solidarity that advocate the recognition of others as the foundation of human action and the source of the renovation of politics, economy and society. The social solidarity economy includes activities and organizations of associative, cooperative, and mutual nature created to respond to the need for jobs and the well-being of people, as well as those citizen movements geared toward democratizing and transforming the economy.” (RIPESS 2017)

The idea of solidarity economy spread rapidly in the 2000's, “thanks in large part to RIPESS and to the amplifying role of the World Social Forums.” (Miller 2010) The spread of

⁵ RIPESS global website: www.ripest.org

solidarity economy to Africa and Asia is evidenced by conferences in Dakar in 2005 and Manila in 2007.

Throughout this period, the movement for global social and economic justice grew, popularizing the slogan “Another World is Possible.” The movement reached a new stage in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis which brought into sharp focus the character of capitalism as “an economy that places the profit of a few above the well being of everyone else.” (Miller 2010, 1) The 15 May Indignados movement in Spain and similar movements around the world, notably, in the U.S., Occupy Wall Street, combined an ambitious vision of social and economic transformation with a commitment to direct-democratic “prefigurative” action – the recuperation of public spaces and the creation of communities of solidarity.

In the shift from “anti-globalization” to “altermondialisme,” the concepts of crisis, occupation, and recuperation are important. They reflect a shift of focus away from protests and demands on the state for increased services to direct actions aimed at recovering, protecting, and developing resources necessary for life. Examples are the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil, which organizes landless farmers to occupy and cultivate disused lands, and the workers in Chicago who created the New Era Windows cooperative after repeated factory occupations, the union struggle featured in Michael Moore's 2009 film *Capitalism, a Love Story*. As Jean Louis Laville wrote, “solidarity economy harmonized with a movement no longer content to protest, articulating its own demands and proposals.” (Laville 2013, 282)

2010's

The U.S. Solidarity Economy Network was founded on the eve of the Global Financial

Crisis, in 2007. In response to the crisis, new activists and existing organizations turned to cooperatives and other solidarity economy activities. In New York City, Hurricane Sandy demonstrated the insufficiency of the existing governmental emergency response system in the face of “superstorms” and the value of self-organization and direct-action networks like SolidarityNYC. Like Razeto and his colleagues and partners, many in this new post-Occupy generation found in solidarity economy a unifying or coordinating concept they could use to build projects that

“move beyond stemming the tide, to grow a resilient and secure city... in a manner that respects and values every individual and every blade of grass... to create an economy for people and the planet.” (SolidarityNYC, 2013)

Today and Tomorrow

In June 2013, veteran black activist Chokwe Lumumba was elected Mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, on a program of political and economic democracy. One of the key organizations in Jackson is Cooperation Jackson, a solidarity economy project which, in addition to borrowing from the Mondragón Cooperative Experience (see “Coordinates” below), draws on the social movement activism of the 1970s and the rich tradition of cooperative economics in African-American communities, a history recently brought to wider attention by Jessica Gordon Nembhard. (Flanders 2014; Nembhard 2014)⁶ Though Lumumba died eight months later, the movement continues and his son, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, was elected Mayor on June 6, 2017. The younger Lumumba shares his father’s commitment. “We have to figure out how the economy will work in the hands of the people.” (Cooperation Jackson 2017).

This sketch of the history of solidarity economy should be enough to give the reader a

⁶ The histories of solidarity economy in latino/a, indigenous and other communities deserve similar study.

sense of how the concept has been used and in what contexts. We next need to specify a set of concepts and coordinates that can be used to identify solidarity economy in practice in the particular context to be studied. The four concepts that seem most important are the centrality of labor, the impact of the planetary crisis, the re-framing economy and society, and the identity of solidarity economy as a sector or a movement. Having examined these, we will look at nine principles, or “coordinates,” of solidarity economy. (Miller 2010)

Four Concepts for Solidarity Economy

1) The Centrality of Labor and the "C Factor"

One of the most important questions for solidarity economy has to do with work – who does it, who controls it, who owns its product and the materials needed to produce them? In standard economic thought, production is understood as a combination of factors, each of which contributes to the value of the product, Land, Labor, and Capital being the most important. In the traditional framework, “Labor” is understood narrowly, as an input to be purchased cheaply and used efficiently.⁷ The capacity of people at work to cooperate, to help and sustain each other, to organize their work and relationships, to control, collaborate, create – this capacity on which capitalist production, like all production, depends – is “used instrumentally and highly exploited” but not recognized as a source of value. (Razeto 1997, 6) Luis Razeto Migliaro, popularizer of the term solidarity economy, has named this capacity for collective activity the “C Factor” (C for cooperation, community, care, and other aspects of the reciprocal relations between people, many of which begin with the letter “C”).

Razeto counts the C Factor separately, but really it is understood to be tied to Labor.

Interestingly, it also includes forms of collective activity related to production, including

⁷ Carmen Huertas-Noble describes this well in her critique of the “Standard Shareholder Oriented Model.” (Huertas-Noble, 2016, 336)

elements like community and family. Simply put, the C Factor is "human solidarity recognized as a factor of production."

But more is at stake than the recognition of a new factor. With the C Factor, Razeto introduced the idea of the "organizing factor" of production. In capitalist production relations, the "organizing factor" is capital, the factor to which the others are subordinated. (Razeto 1997) The invisibility of the C Factor is a symptom of the subordination of production to capital, for which the other factors count only as sources of its increase.

In discussions of solidarity economy, the term "capital" is often used in two senses. On the one hand it denotes an investment of financial resources, in this sense worker cooperatives can be said to have capital, even if they are not capitalist enterprises. On the other hand, as Marx saw, capital is a social relation of production, with human protagonists: capitalists and workers. To keep them clear, it is best to use the proper noun Capital for the social relation.

As the Associationists argued at the dawn of modern capitalism, human beings are inherently equal. The inequality between people that defines capitalist production, the sovereignty of Capital as the organizing factor, is not something given. It has to be imposed and reproduced.⁸ To maintain its position as the organizing factor, Capital must wage a constant struggle, whether openly or surreptitiously, to subordinate the factors Labor and the C Factor. This is a social struggle, the classic example being the struggle over the length of the working day that is the centerpiece of Volume One of Marx's *Capital*.

In solidarity economy, where Capital is no longer the organizing factor, the new organizing factor is dual: Labor and the C Factor. "The rationality of the solidarity... economy is that founded on the factor labor power and the factor community. Labor tightly

⁸ This notion of innate equality comes from 19th century educator Jean-Joseph Jacotot. (Rancière, 1987)

related to community.” (Razeto 1997, 10) Capital, to use the language of the principles of the Mondragón Corporation, is “instrumental and subordinated” and Labor is "sovereign."

Under Capital, Labor is subordinated and treated as a mere input, like energy or materials. In solidarity economy, Labor and the C Factor, divided and denied under Capital, are reintegrated and the functions of coordination and leadership that were alienated from workers and concentrated in the hands of managers are recuperated by the workers and their community. The broader identity of the workers and their participation in social networks that spread beyond the workplace is recognized, and organized in networks of solidarity and inter-cooperation. In order for the solidarity (Labor and the C Factor) to become the organizing principle, the relation between Capital and Labor must be inverted: Labor must become sovereign and Capital must be subordinated and reduced to an instrumental status.

This has important implications for practice. Who does the work, who organizes the work, who directs the work, who controls the work, its conditions and its products, who plans the work and creates strategy; are all key questions. Reliance on familiar top-down management structures with wage-earning employees (or, in the case of most NPOs, volunteers) undermines the emergence and consolidation of the C Factor and Labor as organizing factors.

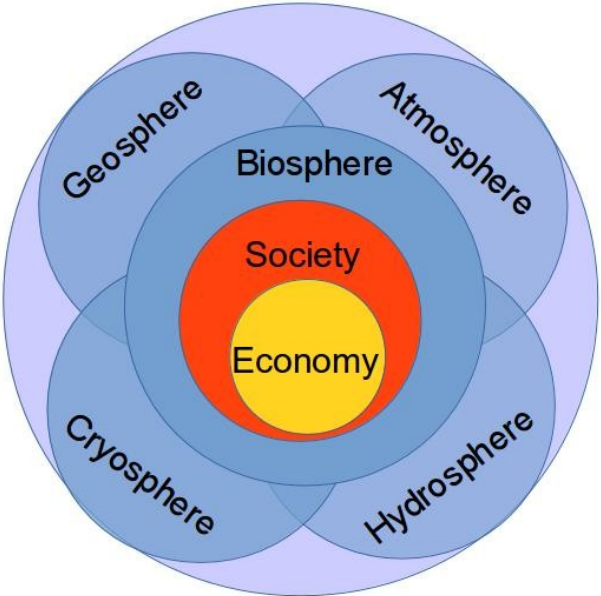
The concepts of sovereignty of Labor and the C Factor also reveal the vital role of workers movements in solidarity economy, including those organized by unions and workers centers. José María Arizmendiarieta, founder of the Mondragón cooperative experience, often insisted that workers cooperatives must be understood as part of a larger workers movement. To forget or devalue this identity would be, he said, to “fall into an unforgivable myopia and lack of solidarity.” (Azurmendi 1991, 824). The founders of ULGOR, the first

workers cooperative at Mondragón, were skilled workers at the Unión Cerrajera lock factory where they helped organize labor struggles in an effort to improve working conditions and democratize the paternalistic but decidedly capitalist firm. (Molina 2005, 334). Failing to win over the factory owners, they decided to leave the company and create a workers cooperative as a vehicle for building democratic, worker-owned, socially conscious enterprise. Even as Arizmendiarieta developed a remarkable ecosystem of cooperative organizations, he never gave up on the goal of social transformation of capitalist production, always maintaining that cooperatives were one form among many in the broader workers movement. This means that worker organizations in capitalist firms – labor unions, workers centers, caucuses and union reform groups – should be understood as crucial players in a solidarity economy strategy.

The sovereignty of Labor and the C Factor, the centrality of human solidarity in production, is a key concept for solidarity economy that has both an ideological importance for cultivating a counter-hegemonic discourse, and a practical importance as the organizing factor of solidarity economy.

2) Planetary Crisis: “Capital Versus Life”

Now we zoom way out – to a planetary perspective. The long-term effects of a social-economic system built on the basis of hydrocarbon consumption and organized around the valorization of capital are increasingly evident. Changes in global temperatures, polar ice levels,



Planetary Spheres

concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, acidification of oceans, deforestation, depletion of fisheries and extinction of species are among the key indicators. It is more than climate change: population growth, global wealth inequality, food insecurity, refugee and migration pressures, the disappearance of languages and cultures, and more make it a multidimensional crisis. (Azkarraga et al. 2011) As Uriarte Zabala et al. write, the system's underlying instrumental rationality has “come into stark contradiction with the logic of reproduction of life to the degree that the principal conflict of our epoch can be described as capital versus life.” (Uriarte, Pagalday, Zufiaurre, 2012, 2)

Today, solidarity economy must start from the recognition of the economy as embedded in a larger sphere of social activity, which is in turn embedded in a larger sphere of life, itself part of an even larger system. We can think of it in terms of concentric circles, with the outermost circle comprising the Atmosphere, Hydrosphere, Cryosphere, and Geosphere; the second circle the Biosphere; the third circle Society; and the fourth Economy. These circles should be understood as inter-penetrating and in constant interaction. For perhaps the second time in our planet’s history (the first being the rise of bacteria), the activity of a species has fundamentally altered planetary systems; we are now in the Anthropocene.

As Naomi Klein has written, climate change "changes everything," including the strategic framework of social movements. (Klein 2015) “Sustainability,” a broad term that can include anything from a kind of pure natural state, without human intervention, to the successful reproduction of the existing socio-economic relations, has been replaced by the concept of “survival” – the prevention of further destruction and mitigation of the irreversible effects that are already occurring. Climate change adds urgency to social struggles, especially the fight for radical democratization of economic and political life, particularly in regards to the energy

sector and the rest of the hydrocarbon economy.

As a key sign of the incompatibility of capital accumulation with life, wealth inequality deserves special mention. Thomas Piketty and his colleagues have shown the growth of inequality to be capitalism's defining, and continuing, historical trend. A recent report by Oxfam indicated that the eight wealthiest men in the world now own as much wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion. (Piketty 2014, 2016; Oxfam 2017; Hardoon, Deborah, et al. 2016⁹ The planetary crisis is both environmental and social.

Former Oxfam researcher Kate Raworth has found a way to visualize this combination of planetary limits and social deficits, over-exploited resources and impoverished populations. She calls it the "doughnut of social and planetary boundaries."

⁹ Kate Raworth's *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* presents a compelling argument for planetary framework that integrates economic, social, and planetary dynamics. (Raworth 2017)

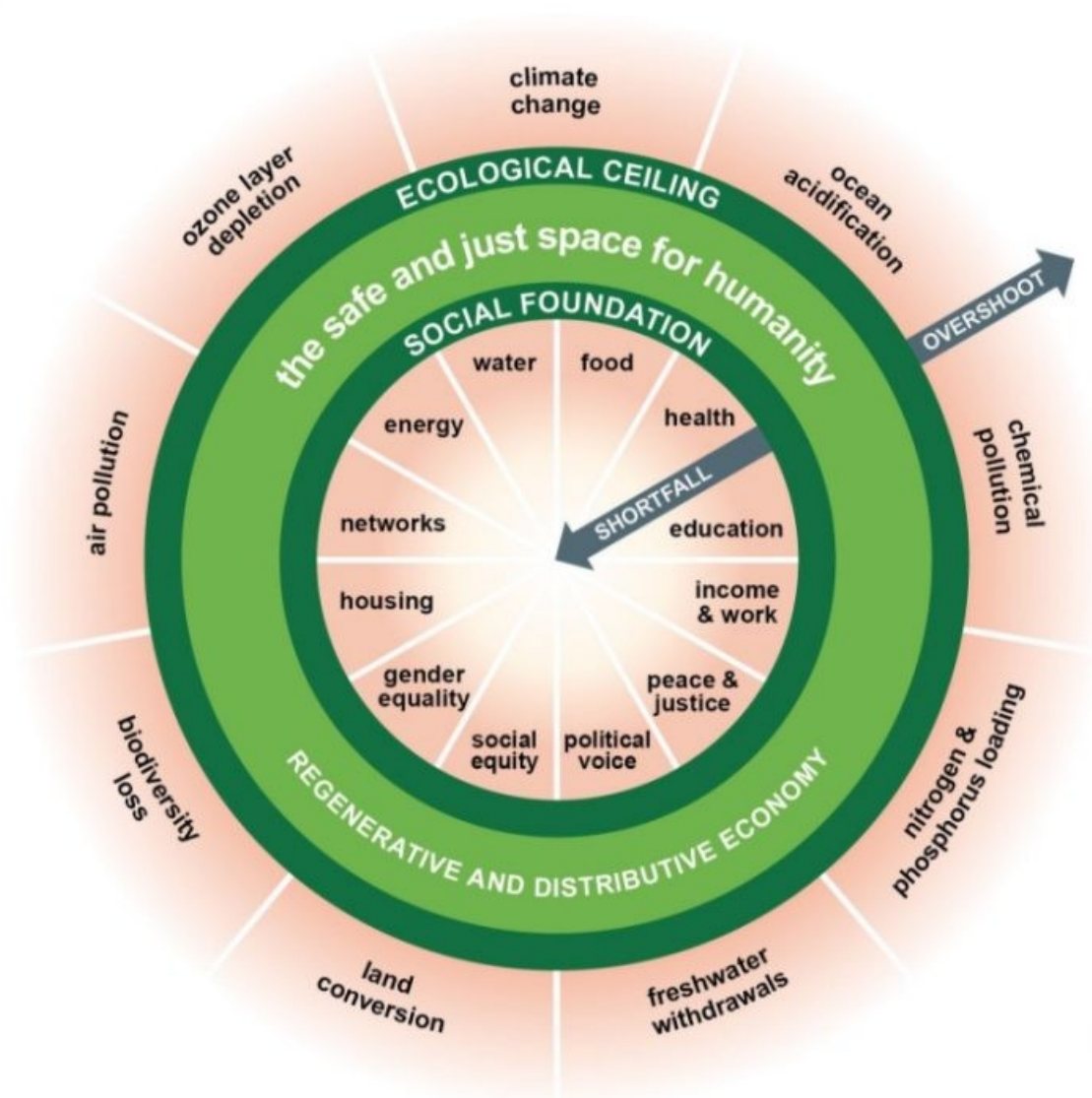


Illustration 1: "The Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries (2017)" (Raworth 2017)

In the inner circle, the doughnut hole, are indices of social needs (based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals). On the outer edge of the circle are the planetary boundaries, where human exploitation of resources become unsustainable (based on the work of Johan Rockström). The green circle, the doughnut, represents the zone of “regenerative and redistributive” economic activity in which planetary resources are used sustainably and social needs are met. The diagram is intended to restate the basic goal of economic activity which is no longer growth as such – an ever-rising GDP – but meeting social needs within planetary

boundaries.

Solidarity economy shares the goal of creating a regenerative and redistributive economy and requires that we re-frame the economy and its relation with society and the planet so as to develop strategies for reaching it.

3) Reframing the Economy

The scale and urgency planetary crisis and growing inequality has inspired action in multiple sites and forms; as Miller says, “alternatives are everywhere.” There are people at work in a wide variety of projects and organizations: “cooperatives, fair trade..., alternative currencies,... credit unions, ...community land trusts and more.” (Miller 2010, 1) The problem is that they are often “invisible,” taken for isolated examples of charitable or virtuous activity, or siloed into sectoral categories, like “nonprofits,” or “social enterprises” and not recognized as elements of an emerging alternative economy.

Solidarity economy helps us find and identify the “compelling array of grassroots economic initiatives” and connect them “in ways that build a coherent and powerful social movement for another economy.” (Miller 2010, 3)

It does this first by changing the definition of “economy.” Miller defines the economy broadly as “all of the diverse ways that human communities meet their needs and create livelihoods together.” Wage labor, government employment, household work, informal work, natural processes are all part of this larger economy. The Australian feminist economic geographers who shared the pen name J. K. Gibson-Graham use the metaphor of an iceberg to illustrate this. The activities normally recognized as economic – typically those involving “wage labor in a capitalist firm” – are above the surface while those underwater go unseen.

Solidarity economy (Gibson-Graham call it “community economics”) takes into account the full iceberg of diverse forms of labor and articulates their connections. (Gibson-Graham 2013) A look below the water line reveals a mix of activities, including, they point out, some that are illegal and unethical. How do we determine which activities belong to the solidarity economy? If they are to constitute an economy, how do they fit together?



Figure 1: Economic Iceberg (Gibson-Graham 2013, 11)

Circles of Solidarity Economy

Ethan Miller approaches this problem by understanding solidarity economy as a circle of “interconnected flows made up of different... spheres of activity” driven by a set of basic human needs. (Miller 2010, 4)

Like the "materials economy" popularized by The Story of Stuff, Miller's circle (Figure 3) looks at the flow of material from creation to production, distribution, consumption, and disposal.¹⁰ This approach is useful for thinking about the consolidation and reproduction of the solidarity economy and the social relationships on which it depends. In Razeto's terms, “reproduction... – absolutely essential for solidarity economies – is about expanding, perfecting, improving human connections, comradeship, unity, [and] networks with other experiences....” (Razeto 1997, 12)

As Miller underscores, the purpose of his model is educational and strategic: this image is not “a diagram of a specific economic structure, but... a tool for strategizing possible

¹⁰ The Story of Stuff, <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>. Raworth makes a similar argument.

connections.” (Miller 2010, 5). The point is to perceive “existing relationships and imagine potential linkages” between activities and organizations. For example, we can see how surplus and waste can become financing and fertilizer for renewed creation and production. Farmers and producer cooperatives can collaborate with solidarity markets. Credit unions can finance the development of co-housing projects, or alternative energy projects, etc. In each part of the circle, and across sections, we can find possibilities for collaboration and networking. As Miller stresses, this is practical work: in each case the people at work are building actual economies and livelihoods. (Miller 2010)

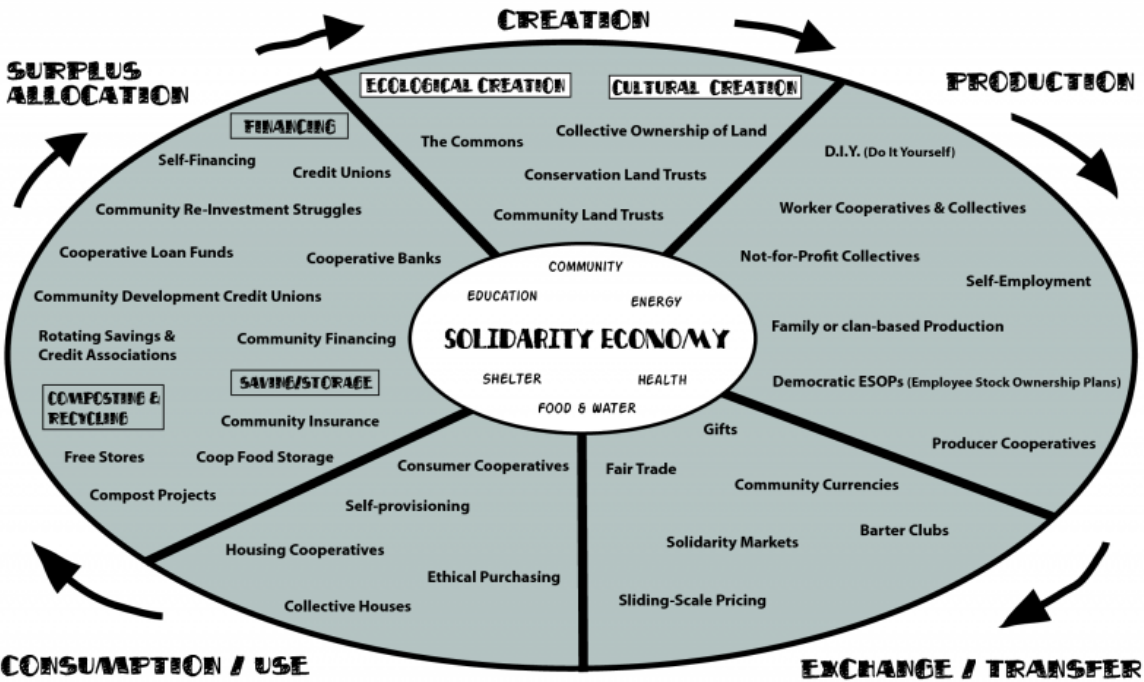


Figure 2: Spheres of Solidarity Economy (Miller 2010, 5)

Miller's circle helps us maintain a wholistic view of solidarity economy. Unfortunately, because Miller's image does not include other, non-solidarity-economy, forms or activities, it does not help us locate solidarity economy in the larger social-economy, which is essential for

developing the type of strategic approach he advocates. For this we need a more complex image like the one used by Mike Lewis and Dan Swinney (2007).

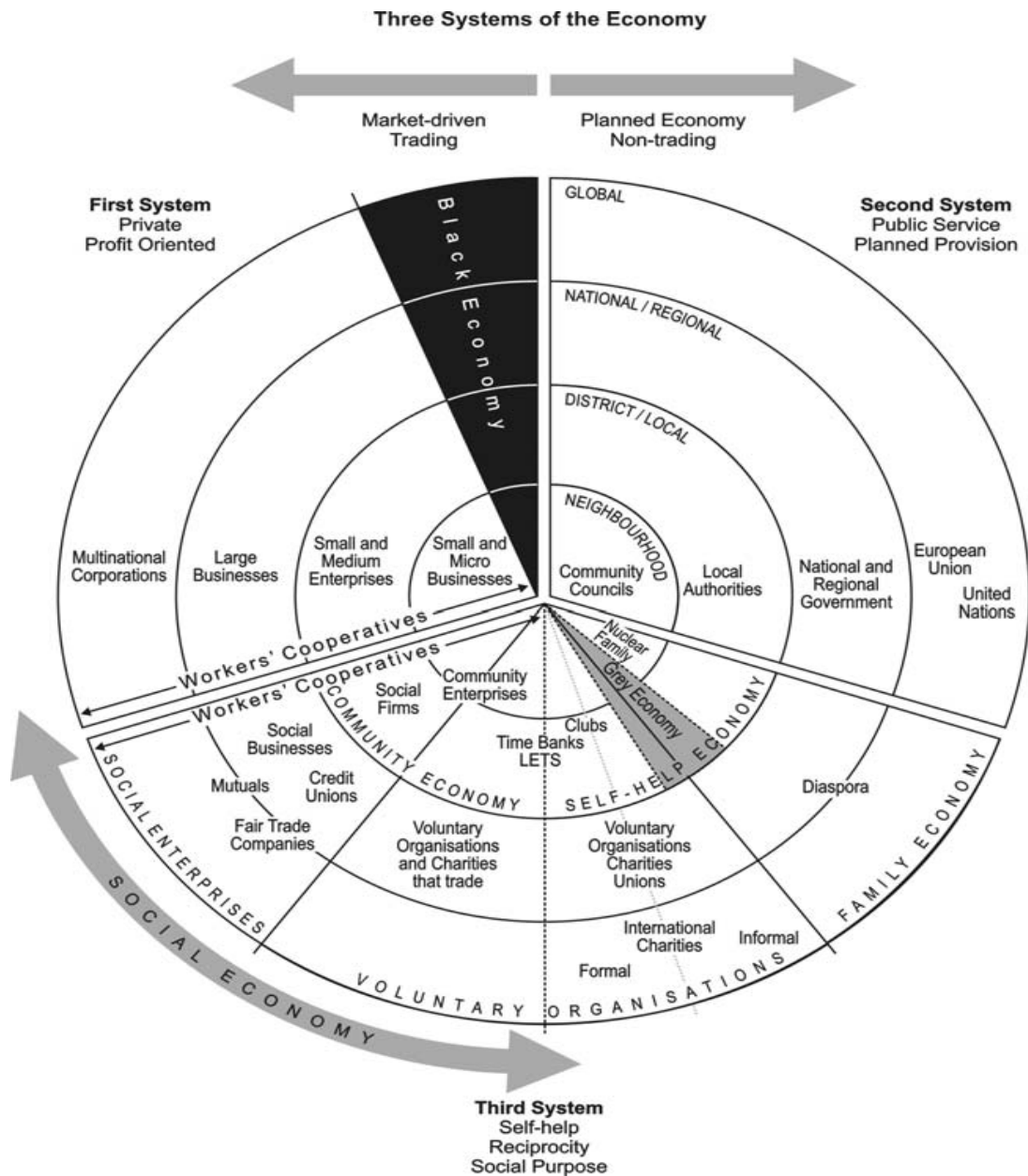


Figure 3: Three Systems (Lewis and Swinney 2007, 3)

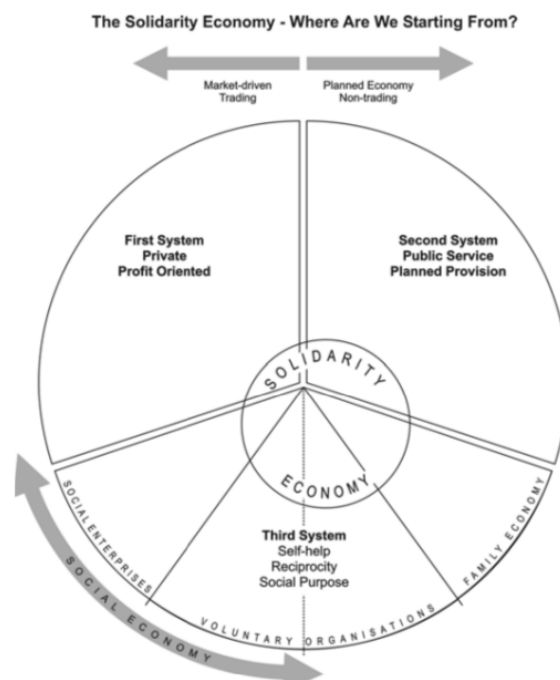
In this schema, economic activity is divided into three “systems” : the Private, Profit-oriented system; the Public Service, Planned Provision system, and a Self-Help, Reciprocity,

Social Purpose system. (Lewis and Swinney, 2007, 3)

The diagram features a geographical axis, from local to global, and an axis of organizational scale, small to large. It includes a space for domestic economy, segments for illegal and informal activities, and a sector of “social economy activities” that includes voluntary organizations, charities, mutual organizations and social enterprises.¹¹

The diagram deserves careful study. I introduce it here to provide just to provide a more comprehensive view of economic activity within which we can locate solidarity economy.

In order to show how solidarity economy differs from social economy, Lewis and Swinney offer a simplified diagram (Figure 4) which depicts solidarity economy not as a sector or system but as a sphere of activity and relationships that cuts across all three systems (though, as they point out, solidarity economy activity is typically found in what they call the “social purpose” system).¹²



This division of systems of economy activity comes from Karl

Figure 4: Solidarity Economy in the Larger Economy

Polanyi's conception of four principles of economic activity: market, redistribution,

¹¹ For purposes of presentation, each system is given equal size and the successive rings are equidistant. It would be interesting to re-scale this diagram to show the actual weight or impact of the different elements. For example, multinational corporations would dwarf the social purpose sector in many respects; international charities would be drastically larger than most workers cooperatives.

¹² The importance of this cross-sectoral concept of solidarity economy is explained by Jean-Louis Laville in *L'Économie Solidaire, Une Perspective Internationale*. (Laville 2013) The diagram also shows how solidarity economy differs from the sectoral concept of social economy.

household, and reciprocity. (Lewis and Swinney subsume household under reciprocity.)

Polanyi's four principles help us to find and recognize solidarity-based activities taking place across the economy, in institutions and forms that are ignored when we limit our view to one form or sector, e.g., nonprofits, social enterprises, cooperatives, etc. This is important in order to avoid the self-restriction of solidarity-based activities to the nonprofit or non-monetary economy, where practitioners often end up struggling to maintain precarious projects on the basis of external funding and volunteer efforts, failing to create sustainable employment and wealth for the community.

A cross-sectoral view is also useful for identifying possible targets of transformation in places where transformation seems least likely, for example, multinational corporations, and for establishing links among organizations and projects operating in different sectors and at different levels, e.g. labor unions, workers centers, fair trade or global labor rights groups, cooperatives, credit unions, nonprofit organizations, local governments, and social and political movements. The inclusion of activities in the market and state sectors enables us to enlarge the spheres of action and the people involved, recuperating links with the solidarity-based activities that occur within capitalist institutions, even in subordinated forms, and encouraging the formation of democratic organizations in which capital is subordinated, like cooperatives.

This also requires us to maintain a critical attitude toward the social relations at work in reciprocity-based organizations where the relations of inequality typical of capitalist production can reemerge at any time. The challenge is to develop diversified economic activities without a) reproducing the inequalities which have governed the relationships between market and non-market activities during the history of capitalism (not to mention the

inequalities which have characterized human relations within institutions,) and b) ignoring the need for solidarity with those struggling against capital within market organizations.

4) Sector or Movement?

As helpful as this more complex conception of the place of solidarity economy activities in the context of the various sectors or systems may be, it remains insufficient because, as Miller says, solidarity economy is “not so much a model of economic organization as a process of economic organizing.” The goal is not to build a new (third? fourth?) sector, but “to build a coherent and powerful social movement for another economy.” (Miller 2010, 3)

To build this movement we must expand our circle to include social movements that do not appear in the economic spheres. We need to integrate efforts to build a new economy with other “organized efforts to challenge structures of economic, social and ecological injustice and.. build popular power.” (Miller 2010, 8) Solidarity economy is an important framework because it “integrates economic alternatives into social movements and social movements into economic alternatives.” (Miller 2010, 8) This integration of civil society and political movements is characteristic of solidarity economy. (Laville 1994)

As Jean-Louis Laville has emphasized, solidarity economy creates “public spaces of proximity” from which social movements can arise, spaces of “associations and popular initiatives in which inter-subjectivity can become creative of new norms.” (Laville 2013)

“The existence of voluntary gatherings in which the driving forces of action escape the market and bureaucratic logics becomes a determining factor in the elaboration of institutions which draw their strength from “the power of social integration that solidarity represents,” and which foment public debate through the free formation of opinions; solidarity economy can be one way to engender such institutions.” (Laville 2013, 74)

We live in times in which dramatic and relatively short-term change is required. Solidarity economy offers an ambitious framework and practical space for transformation of the society and economy, the relationship between them, and our relationship with the earth itself.

Coordinates of Solidarity Economy

We have a sense of solidarity economy and key concepts that we can use to understand it, what Laville calls “a sense of a world that is shared with others.” (Laville 2013, 72) As a practical matter, how do we identify solidarity economy activities? What do such a wide variety of activities spread across all sectors of the economy and beyond have in common? How does solidarity economy differ in practice from other socially responsible, sustainable, or progressive strategies?

Most organizations address this need for a coherent practical vision by drawing up a list of principles or values to articulate their strategic orientation. Ethan Miller offers such one such list, but stresses that the principles it includes are better understood as “coordinates for shared ethical debate and learning.” (Miller 2010, 7)

This very helpful shift in language from “principles” to “coordinates” points to a basic philosophical issue. Solidarity economy is not a model or a set of fixed principles, it is an evolving and open-ended practice – to use Arizmendiarrieta's preferred metaphor, from the poet Antonio Machado, it is a road we make by walking. Solidarity economy is pluralistic not just because it includes a diversity of activities or sectors, but because it is "regenerative" always radically open to debate and collective learning, deeply democratic, unstable but always reborn.

We can see the conceptual pluralism at work in solidarity economy in the coordinates used by organizations and researchers, for example the three lists in the following table: Miller's "coordinates," the principles of RIPESS, and those of Cooperation Jackson.

RIPESS (Reseau Intercontinental pour la Promotion de l'Économie Social et Solidaire) is an intercontinental network for the promotion of the social solidarity economy with member networks in five continents. The coordinates listed below are from the RIPESS North America network.

Cooperation Jackson is an organization working to “advance the development of economic democracy in Jackson, Mississippi, by building a solidarity economy anchored by a network of cooperatives and other types of worker-owned and democratically self-managed enterprises.” (Cooperation Jackson, 2017)

Coordinates of Solidarity Economy		
Miller	RIPES	Cooperation Jackson
Cooperation and mutuality	Humanism	Internal cooperation (within the Federation of Cooperative Jackson)
Individual and collective well-being	Equality, equity and justice for all	Instrumental and subordinated character of capital
Economic and social justice (or equity)	Solidarity	Sovereignty of labor
Ecological health	Sustainable development	Autonomy and independence
Democracy	Democracy	Democratic member control
Diversity and Pluralism	Diversity	Members' economic participation
(Miller 2010)	Creativity	Self-management
	Inclusiveness	Pay solidarity
	Respecting the integration of countries and people	Voluntary and open membership
	A plural and solidarity-based economy	External cooperation (among cooperatives)
	Subsidiarity	Education, training and information
	(RIPES 2008)	Social transformation
		Universal nature
		(Cooperation Jackson 2016, adapted from the ten cooperative values of the Mondragón Corporation)

Table 1: Coordinates of Solidarity Economy

The Nine Coordinates used in this study

In the spirit of re-generation, I offer another list based on the history of solidarity economy and four concepts outlined above. The nine coordinates described below are designed for three uses: as criteria for identifying solidarity economy practices and defining a basis for unity and collaboration; as focal points for discussion, debate and learning; and as a

framework for elaborating criteria and measures for self-assessment and accountability.

Equity – The starting point of solidarity economy is the recognition of equality of people and the verification of that equality in practice.¹³ Equity, the equal treatment of people, includes open and voluntary membership, as well as efforts to overcome all forms of discrimination and inequality, both within organizations and in the society. This is especially important in contexts with a history of racial, gender and other discrimination, like the USA.

Democracy and Transparency – Democratization of the economy and the society is the strategic mission of solidarity economy as well as a principle of organization. Internally, democracy is evidenced in the organizational and legal forms that support democratic participation and control in the daily life of the organization, and in the degree and quality of participation in governance, management and work. Access to information needed to participate on an equal footing with other members is also important. Externally, participation in social movements, especially those for democracy and transparency, is an indicator of democracy in practice.

Sovereignty of Labor – The democratic control and ownership of work by workers in conditions of equity. Worker membership, ownership, participation in governance and management, and equal access to information, are all important elements of labor sovereignty. Labor sovereignty refers to the democratic exercise of power and control by workers over economic activity. In a workers cooperative, for example, the people who do the work own and control the means of production and the products and control the production process. (In order that this sovereignty not be constituted on an unjust basis, equity, community, social transformation, and other coordinates must be taken into account as well.) Where workers are subordinated to capital, labor sovereignty begins with struggles for dignity, respect, and

¹³ The concept of verification, a key tool for horizontal pedagogy, comes from Joseph Jacotot (Rancière, 1987)

power, a mix of self-defense and struggles for "more." Though they take place in the capitalist economy, these struggles are indispensable elements of solidarity economy as a strategy for social transformation. This means that labor unions and campaigns for workers rights, for example, are as much a part of solidarity economy as worker cooperatives.

Capital Subordination – a necessary but insufficient condition of labor sovereignty, which also requires democracy and equity. Because Capital is the hegemonic organizing factor in our society, the restriction of the power and influence of Capital in the ownership, governance, and management of organizations is an ongoing task. Organizations that fail to continually practice Capital subordination may soon find themselves adopting practices that privilege capital valorization and hierarchical control. In organizations where Capital has not been subordinated, efforts to democratize the organization and subordinate Capital become a key goal. Because Capital is a social relation that extends beyond any given workplace, its subordination implies not just a change in the social relations in a firm, but a process of social transformation. See Social Transformation below.)

Cooperation (and inter-cooperation) – The typical organizational form of solidarity economy has been the workers cooperative or collective because of the combination of democracy, shared ownership, solidarity and cooperation in such enterprises. Nonetheless, solidarity economy includes a diversity of forms and the cooperation that concerns us is not only that internal to an organization, or to a company group (inter-cooperation), but also the broader cooperation among organizations and social movements. This second level of organization and inter-cooperation facilitates economic and political economies of scale, and also creates “communities of mutual accountability.” (Miller 2010, 12)

Community (solidarity and development) – The social mission at the heart of solidarity

economy is creating equitable and democratic communities and societies. Social movement activity often takes the form of community-based organization. Creation of employment, one of the key objectives of solidarity economy, is crucial for community development. At the same time, using the concept of the C Factor, we can see community as closely linked to production, not a separate sphere, and look for connections and opportunities for collaboration.

Protection and Recuperation – Climate change and inequality are the most urgent problems of our time. From the beginning, solidarity economy has developed together with notions of environmental protection and sustainable practices. The recent struggles by indigenous people and allies at Standing Rock Reservation to stop the construction of oil pipelines make an important point – in calling themselves “protectors, not protesters” they take the standpoint of sovereignty, defending the earth and the water that belongs to all. In a similar way, workers who occupy and take over factories – notably in South America, where they are known as “recuperated factories” – are protecting their jobs and communities.¹⁴ The concepts of protection and recuperation are important elements of solidarity economy. This is also true of efforts to protect culture, language, and history.

Social Transformation – The realization of equity, democracy, labor sovereignty, capital subordination, cooperation, community development, and protection and sustainability amount to a project of broad and deep change in the basic structures, practices, and ideologies of modern society. The explicit recognition of social transformation as its goal, distinguishes solidarity economy from ideas of a self-contained social economy sector, or of social economy as a supplement, complement, or correction to the abuses or failures of capitalist

¹⁴ See “The Take,” the 2004 documentary by Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis about the recuperated factories movement in Argentina.

society. (Laville 1994) Social transformation unites the utopian and practical aspects of solidarity economy.

Education (transparency, innovation) – the origin of solidarity economy. For Mondragón founder Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta, education was at the core of cooperativism. The development of the individual and collective capacity for cooperation and social transformation took a very practical form; before the first cooperative was launched, Arizmendiarieta set up youth clubs, religious study circles, and a school for young workers. Education is the link between daily practice and the basic philosophical framework. Because solidarity economy is a road made by walking, in which the basic principles and strategies must continually be regenerated, and the existing practices questioned and challenged, it implies a constant practice of learning and inquiry.

Education has another specific value in solidarity economy: innovation. Solidarity economy is a massive project of decentralized, horizontal, social innovation, requiring what Laville calls an “*entrepreneuriat solidaire*.” (Laville 2013, 291) At the same time, it also requires constant innovation in technology and production processes. Education, too, is an area of innovation, as we see in the new forms of team and cooperative entrepreneurship pioneered in the Tiimi Akatemia at Jyväskylä University in Finland and spread worldwide by Mondragón University's Mondragón Team Academy.

Conclusion: the Social Impact of Solidarity Economy

Solidarity economy offers a pluralistic, re-generative conceptual framework that we can use to make visible the outlines of a new socio-economy that responds to the urgent challenges of our time. As the history of the term shows, as a concept solidarity economy has

had a social impact, providing organizers and researchers the framework for developing strategies of bottom-up socio-economic transformation that go beyond more limited sectoral approaches that offer social impact without social transformation. It has been said, but it is perhaps good to stress, that the concepts and coordinates presented here are intended as an offer of dialogue and debate. Solidarity economy only becomes a shared identity – if it does at all – as a result of exchange and mutual learning among practitioners and theorists. How this conceptual framework is applied in practice is the subject of my next article.

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